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ABSTRACT

It is not news that managerial discourses have dominated government educational policy and programs in Australia since the mid 1980s. During this period there has also been a proliferation of discourses about literacy. The common sense view is that literacy empowers disadvantaged people and assists failing economies. The last decade and a half has seen a discursive shift from education as a human right to education as a government investment. However, the effects of managerial discourses in actual classrooms--preferred pedagogies, enacted curriculum, assessment practices, classroom talk, and allocation of time--are rarely studied and difficult to ascertain. This paper considers the ways in which managerial discourses impact on what teachers and students can do and say in literacy lessons. The paper aims to show the potential of Foucauldian interpretative analytics for examining the local material effects of discursive practices in the everyday institutional lives of teachers and students. It illustrates how managerialist discourses were deployed and contested in one disadvantaged school community in South Australia. The paper provides active analysis of how and where such discursive practices insinuate themselves in the minute details of everyday life, and at the same time it seeks to signal the risks of a managerialist discourse for disadvantaged students. (Contains 38 references, and 4 figures and 3 tables of data.) (NKA)

**Managerial discourses: Tracking the local effects on teachers' and students' work
in literacy lessons**

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B. Comber

It is not news that managerial discourses have dominated government educational policy and programs in Australia since the mid eighties, first in the human capital rhetoric of the federal Labor party and more recently in the Liberal emphasis on 'measurable outcomes' and 'choice'. During this period there has also been a proliferation of discourses about literacy. In 1991 the first national Language and Literacy Policy was released by the federal Labor Minister John Dawkins and a new Liberal version is planned for release later in 1997. The commonsense view, actively produced in the press and government policy, is that literacy empowers disadvantaged people and assists failing economies. The imperative is to develop better pedagogies to raise 'levels of literacy' for the good of the individual and society. Literacy is seen as a cure all, with some politicians claiming that higher literacy levels will solve delinquency problems. It becomes the ticket to personal liberation, empowerment, employment and to a happy productive well-behaved society.

The last decade and a half has seen a discursive shift from education as a human right to education as a government investment. There have been many telling analyses of policy and programs in these new times which suggest the dangers of these fundamentally economic ways of constituting the purposes and the consequences of education (Gee & Lankshear, 1995; Green, Hodgins & Luke, 1994; Knight, Lingard & Bartlett, 1994; Marginson, 1993; Rizvi, 1995). However the effects of managerial discourses in actual classrooms – preferred pedagogies, enacted curriculum, assessment practices, classroom talk and allocation of time – are rarely studied and difficult to ascertain.

My interest, as teacher educator and educational researcher, is in the ways in which managerial discourses impact on what teachers and students can do and say in literacy lessons. These discourses produce new questions for me to grapple with as I work with teachers in professional development contexts and do research in schools. What effects do repeated claims about falling literacy standards have in schools and classrooms? How does the new urgency and anxiety about literacy, as a matter for government concern, intersect with professional educational discourses about literacy and pedagogy? To what extent does the proliferation of discourses about literacy result in a re-disciplining of teachers and students? How are these discourses taken up, used and resisted by teachers and students in a socio-economically disadvantaged community?

I am interested in these questions not only as a researcher, but also because as an educator and as a writer of educational materials for teachers, I am concerned about the effects of my own discursive practices and in particular how such professional knowledges and their associated programmatic effects impact on those students who

benefit the least from contemporary educational practices. Here my aim is to show the potential of Foucauldian interpretative analytics for examining the local material effects of discursive practices in the everyday institutional lives of teachers and students. I illustrate how managerialist discourses were deployed and contested in one disadvantaged school community.

Critical discourse analysis can be productive and positive work, which can contribute, in Foucault's terms, to people seeing that they are 'much freer than they feel' (Foucault, 1988, p.10). My intention here is not to offer yet another illustration of the docile subject in the face of managerialist discourses, but to provide active analysis of how and where such discursive practices insinuate themselves in the minute details of everyday life and so to suggest how and where resistance happens. At the same time I want to signal the risks of a managerialist discourse (or for that matter any dominant educational discourse) for disadvantaged students.

Using Foucault

Foucault's work cannot simply be applied, but can be considered as a set of theoretical tools which can be used. Foucault himself, 'spoke of theory as a tool-box of concepts' (Rajchman 1995, p.14). Here my approach is to make use of Foucault's 'tool-box' in reading the discursive practices constituting literacy, pedagogy and disadvantage at a particular time and place.

Foucault argued that human subjects are constructed through discursive practices. For example 'the disadvantaged', 'the delinquent', 'the at-risk', 'the illiterate', the unemployed' are products of contemporary educational, legal, psychological, economic and sociological discourses (Collins 1991; Luke 1992; Marshall 1990). These disciplinary knowledges produce ways of classifying and naming the population and are taken up in government policies and programs, but it is in local institutions where such knowledges are applied in locating, managing, monitoring and assessing the individual (in schools, hospitals and families) that the operations and effects of discursive practices are in daily evidence. It is in these sites that professional knowledges are deployed in deciding what counts as 'normal' within a society at a particular time. My question here then is: How do managerialist discourses constitute 'the disadvantaged child' as the subject for school literacy programs and what limits and possibilities do such discursive and institutional practices create for students and their teachers?

In addition to Foucault's theoretical insight about the constitutive nature of discourses, his irreverence towards truth claims is a helpful starting point for me as a literacy educator who has actively contributed to producing the 'truth' about teaching literacy.

Rereading contemporary educational discourses in the light of Foucault's work disrupts accepted rationalities, taken-for-granted claims and plausibility structures about literacy and raises a number of questions about the discursive practices which foreground literacy at the present time and link it to questions of economy and power.

- Why is there a proliferation of discourses regarding literacy in the late twentieth century?
- Why is it that literacy is allied with the empowerment of disadvantaged groups?
- What regimes of truth are produced in discourses that put literacy, pedagogy and disadvantage together?
- What kinds of student subjects are constructed in the competing discourses of and around literacy?
- What kinds of teacher subjects are produced in these discourses?
- Which educational discourses are employed by teachers?
- What kinds of literate subjectivities are produced in this particular disadvantaged school?

Such questions require an analysis which examines together macro and micro, global and local. Such questions require reading public, authorised texts alongside and against those produced by teachers and students in specific local sites. Whilst some neo-marxian educators remain skeptical of post-structuralist approaches (Anyon 1994; Apple 1993), here I argue that a Foucauldian analysis can demonstrate the differential material effects of discursive practices on the enacted curriculum and students' educational trajectories (Luke 1995).

The local site and the production of data

Over a two year period I worked as a researcher in a disadvantaged Catholic parish school in South Australia. The school was culturally highly diverse. Over seventy percent of the children were classified as living below the poverty line and most others were on low family incomes. The female principal was in her second year as administrator and had been charged with improving enrolments as the school was perilously close to being closed. The context in which the study was conducted is important because the deployment of discourses, however apparently homogeneous, actually varies in different places and times. One can see how an emphasis on accountability and literacy standards may have a different impact in a school in financial difficulties serving a linguistically and culturally diverse community living in poverty compared with the effects in a wealthy, culturally homogenous school. It is not that the

managerial discourse does not have effects in both places, but that in all likelihood those effects will be different, if unpredictable.

As Luke (1995, p18) argues 'texts and discourse do not have equal effects in the world' and the 'same' discourses in different places may have contrastive effects. Thus a managerial discourse may be dominant in educational policies and programs and background humanistic or social justice discourses and such a discursive dominance will produce different problems and practices for teachers in different locations. Teachers' histories and lifeworlds will mean that they hear the imperatives of managerial discourses in different ways and apply them differently in their pedagogical practice. In addition, the ethos of school communities is not reducible to its statistics. To say that a school serves a 'diverse and disadvantaged community' is to imply a great deal about a context, but to say little about its ways of operating and dynamic relationships of its membership. Hence the catalytic effects of discourses (however dominant) vary because they enter different material and discursive environments and possibilities.

My project was not to seek out managerialist discourses in teachers' discursive practices – and in any case it took no detective work to find it. It was there – pervasively so. Nor in foregrounding managerial discourses, do I suggest that these discourses went uncontested. Rather managerial discourses are simultaneously taken up, resisted and reworked with other discourses and practices in specific sites. In this school community for instance, social justice, progressivism, behaviourism, Catholicism, managerialism and so on were all prominent in the everyday talk of teachers and administrators.

This research project involved the production, selection and use of different kinds of texts – a corpus of texts concerned with literacy, pedagogy and disadvantage. The corpus comprised three sets of data – publicly available texts (including newspaper articles, policy documents and academic texts); written documents produced at the school (including official documents, policies, teacher programs, parent information pack, school advertising, newsletters, day books, roll books, submissions for funding, school census data, and teacher-written student report cards); and oral texts (including fieldnotes and transcripts of interviews, staff meetings and classroom literacy lessons).

How to apply poststructuralist theory of discourse, power/knowledge and subjectivity to such a corpus is not a given. A method must be built which deals with the problems at hand. Foucault's work is most commonly applied in sociological and educational research to the study of written rather than spoken texts (Gore 1994; Waitzkin 1991). However, researchers interested in the everyday relations of power in institutional settings (such as doctor-patient interactions, teacher-student exchanges) have seen the

potential of Foucault's work for analyses of spoken discourse (Burman & Parker, 1993; Fairclough, 1992; Gore, 1994; Luke 1992; Ryan, 1989; Waitzkin, 1991; Walkerdine, 1984).

In relating the everyday talk to macro discursive practices I found the metaphor 'traverse of discourses' (Luke & Luke, 1995) a helpful device in considering how power is exercised in Foucault's 'capillary' fashion in workplaces such as schools (Foucault, 1980).

Similar statements, constructions, images and metaphors may appear and reappear in written and spoken texts like the policy document, the syllabus, principals' memos, the staffroom conversation, the teachers' guidebook, and, of course, the textbook. (Luke & Luke, 1995, p.371)

Across such a corpus of texts I considered both the discursive practices of those who make authoritative statements about the role of literacy in the lives of disadvantaged students and the discursive practices of those who are authorised to make these students literate. Published official texts were read with and against the everyday texts produced in the course of teachers and students' work in one disadvantaged school. By reading these data sets with and against each other I explored the contradictory nature of teachers' work and the multiplicities of teacher and student subjectivities produced in this school at this time. The oral data derived from ethnographic fieldnotes was treated as 'text' (Luke 1995; Burman & Parker 1992; Waitzkin 1991). In treating transcripts as texts I signal a move away from any attempt at ethnographic portrayal of school life and its meanings for participants. In reading across the corpus of texts I considered the recurring vocabulary, including terms such as 'work', 'quality', 'behaviour', 'standards'. These words appeared repeatedly across the corpus of policy documents, newspapers, interviews, staffroom and classroom conversations, official school documents and teachers' and students' assessments.

Given the constraints of space here, I will consider slices of the data around the keywords 'quality' and 'work' which are crucial in the intersection between managerial and educational discourses. I explore the interplay of texts which link 'quality' and 'work' with constructions of pedagogy and 'disadvantage'. I first track the deployment of the 'quality' discourse in pedagogical and curriculum practices. Second, I look at how the vocabulary of 'work' infiltrated teachers' classroom talk and assessments of students' literacy. In concluding, I refer briefly to instances of 'resistance' (Foucault, 1978), where teachers and students played with and contested the managerialist discursive regime.

Managerial discourses in a disadvantaged school: 'Quality' as keyword

During the eighties and early nineties literacy standards and the quality of teaching simultaneously became areas for government review and policy production

(Commonwealth of Australia, 1990, 1991). Questions of teacher quality were constituted within an overly instrumentalist and human capital perspective of education (Knight *et al.*, 1994). Not surprisingly then the first national literacy policy was informed by the same economic and managerial discourses. The media took up these government agendas and contributed to the beliefs that there was a crisis in public schooling, that literacy standards were declining and that youth unemployment was related to illiteracy rates and the failure of 'trendy' teaching methods (Green *et al.*, 1994). At the same time the popular press continued to contribute to a construction of poverty as deserved, by marking the unemployed as 'dole-bludgers'. I do not attempt an analysis of policy and media texts in this paper (see Bessant, 1993 & 1995 for an analysis of government policy and media representations of youth unemployment and Green *et al.*, 1994 for an analysis of the changing construction of literacy in Australia). My concern here is with their local effects on the everyday discursive and institutional practices, where and how and by whom the quality discourse, in particular, is produced in staffrooms, classrooms, curriculum and assessment practices.

Quality was a keyword which was deployed across domains, including academic work, products and time. The principal and teachers were involved in close monitoring of the outward signs of quality in children's books, the physical appearance of the playground, students' posture, or behaviour in classrooms. Raising teachers' expectations and the quality of students' work was part of the principal's stated social justice agenda for the school. Starting with the physical environment, teachers were encouraged to enforce high standards of neatness in the yard and in classrooms and were given regular written reminders in the day book, as a teacher made clear in an interview.

All it is, [referring to the day book] is big tell-offs to all of us - like the yard is disgusting, the classes are disgusting.

One teacher explained how the principal's concern with overall standards became evident during an incident where the principal is reported to have publicly reprimanded a student for graffiti in her school book. The teacher's recount describes more than just the incident. It illustrates how students were given a new code of behaviour and standards which incorporated their physical manner and their school books as objects of surveillance. By this account, the principal's quality imperative includes cleaning up the school, the yard, the classroom, the workbook and the untidy student body.

Like J [student] would be lying on the table and she'd come in and bellow at her while the teacher's sitting there. She thinks she ripped up one of her books. Yeah. She's got this real thing. I don't like it either I probably wouldn't take my own hand to it, though I'd make them do it; but graffiti and that kind of stuff and the kids last year their books were full of 'C [student's name] sucks' and that kind of stuff and she just ripped it into shreds.

Here the quality discourse brings new sites of surveillance together – literate behaviours, physical behaviours and implied attitudes – and in so doing spells out what a quality student does not do. The quality student does not lie on the desk, does not write graffiti, does not write offensive comments about her peers and does not have untidy workbooks. The secretary who had worked in the school for some twenty years made an unsolicited comment about the principal's emphasis on quality and standards.

I've noticed. And quality, making kids look proud of themselves and with her it's not just one thing. It has to be well rounded and she's passed it on to the staff and now staff have those expectations... Children's application has lifted, therefore the standards have lifted.

However, teachers who had recently been appointed to the school continued to see standards as problematic. In particular, they talked about the need to improve the quality of student work.

We've had a bit of an influence but in the first year that I was there I couldn't get over it. What was acceptable with behaviour, what was acceptable with things like book work and standards and how you spoke to adults, but also the output and the quality, like product just didn't hardly exist at all and not that I'm product oriented but it's got to be there. There was lots of the notion of kids have got to be kids and we have to go from where they're at and they've got to have lots of time to play, time to experiment. You know? Sure. But they also need discipline. You know that airy fairy, there's no guts to it. So I thought that was a common thread that I didn't agree with.

This teacher's approach to quality emphasises output, product, standards and accountability. She challenges progressivist child developmental discourses by reconstructing the 'kids' as 'student workers'. Her approach (and that of the colleagues who share her view) is contrasted with those of the previous staff (some of whom remain at the school). The quality discourse is set up in opposition to the child-centred approach, which is described as 'airy fairy' and as having 'no guts to it' (See Table 1). By implication such an approach evokes a lack of discipline, productivity and quality.

Table 1. Quality vs Child-centred Discourses

quality	child-centred
product	kids
discipline	time to play
[acceptable] behaviour	time to experiment
quality	no guts to it
standards	airy fairy

While the teacher does not go so far as to claim that the child-centred emphases are totally unimportant, she argues for a new quality regime where discipline, productivity, acceptable behaviour and standards are more important. Traces of this critique are

visible in some of the teachers' assessments of students' literacy standards, as 'appalling', 'at risk', and 'horrifying' and in characterising the students themselves as 'illiterate' or 'marginally literate'.

I also discovered a whole pile of things academically about them. I discovered that as a group research for them was copying slabs out of books, and I discovered that the majority of my class, except for five children, are unable to write a sentence, that very few of my children were able to use full stops and capital letters, that the spelling with half of my class was not at the level of sight words with my receptive ones and now. I also discovered that handwriting was absolutely indecipherable and I discovered that they have a heavy dependence on concrete materials in mathematics. So that was just something you might want to ask me some questions about - the academic.... They're really only in school for a very little time. When you look at the rest of the time. Then I looked at the hectic lifestyles they lead and what sort of support structures are in place for homework and reading, about taking pride in their work and you know taking pride in their handwriting. All those sorts of things are my values. I also looked at the way they actually curse each other, the way they set each other up, the way they manipulated each other.... the lack of sense of humour.

When literacy is constituted as a problem it is often reduced to grids of skills and students are described in terms of 'deficits' and 'lacks' (Luke, 1993). A negative evaluation of literacy can easily slide into a paired negative evaluation of assumed lifestyle. Literacy lessons can then become the sites for moral remediation, aesthetic training and work practices. What counts as quality therefore is situationally dependent. One teacher explains how she dealt with the concept of quality through poetry writing, simultaneously making quality the object of discussion, the content of their writing and their academic goal.

I'm sick of rushing through though. Quality means time. All too often we're looking at checklists, where if kids are given time they'll be able to. They did quality poems and I took them off to U (university where teacher is studying). We talk about quality. It's connected to purpose to having quality equipment. I told them, "This must be something very special". Some didn't finish and that was a learning process for them. I gave them an exercise to do. We talked about the word 'quality' and maintained what we thought it was. Basically something that worked really well, a time when they felt good about something. Then we looked at what they considered quality items, eg. clothing, eg. something that's not going to have a hole in it or not clean and dirty. We talked about a quality friendship. They were quite perceptive. We brainstormed the last time they.... you experienced quality. I give them a simple model. I'm learning very quickly that with this bunch of children you keep your expectations confined. I gave them a really closed model to write and five or six lines of a piece of prose. It was a poem. 'Quality is... Describe with two to three word lines. OK here's your equipment.'

In this short monologue taken from an interview the teacher demonstrates the ways in which discourses of literacy, disadvantage, pedagogy and quality come together as she makes decisions about her work. Faced with the pressure to lift standards she explicitly makes quality a part of her language curriculum. The quality discourse is initially invoked as providing a rationale for letting children have more time, purpose, equipment to produce something really special. While the quality discourse appears to be taken up with zeal and the children's responses to the topic are described as

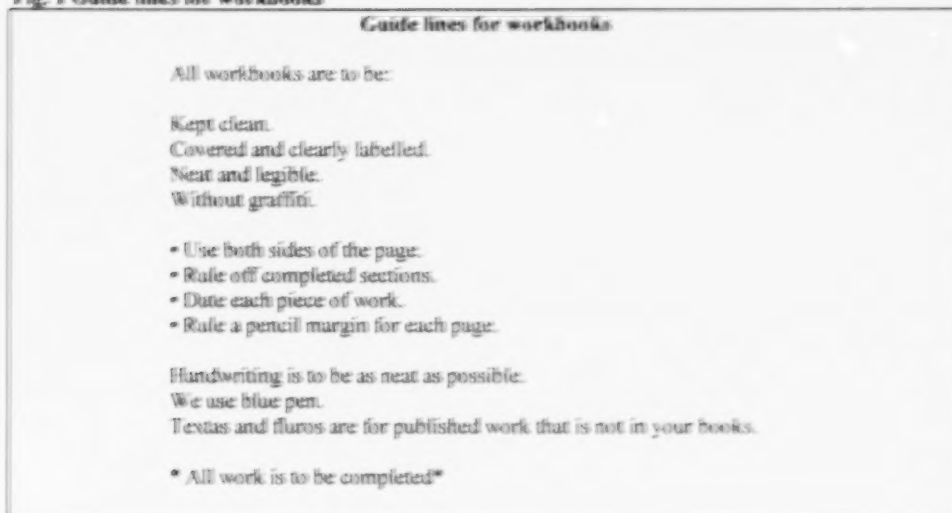
perceptive, the teacher qualifies her optimism where 'this bunch of children' are concerned.

The pedagogical effects of her assessments of students results in her giving them 'a simple model', 'a really closed model'. The teacher does not abandon the quality discourse however, she subjects students to it directly. The combined outcomes of the quality discourse and the teacher's assessments of students' limits result in a pedagogy which promises purpose, time, quality equipment, something special, but ultimately requires that the children write to a closed formula within a deadline. In effect, the deployment of the quality discourse in this context results in an extremely limited task, by any criterion. Further it is a task where particular dispositions around 'quality', such as cleanliness and clothes without holes, are made available for these disadvantaged children to draw on.

While the quality discourse has moved the teacher away from rushing through with predefined checklists as her guide, at the same time it heralds an outcome driven pedagogy where the teacher and students are simultaneously disciplined and constrained. The task of writing a poem about quality becomes one of filling the blanks with vocabulary previously discussed in class: 'Quality is friendship' etc. The teacher guarantees children produce a 'quality product' by avoiding risks that go with choice and complexity. Without worksheets, drills, the literacy lesson can still be made a site where children learn to fill in the blanks drawing from a preselected, prepractised vocabulary. Certain uses of the quality discourse along-side a social justice rhetoric can lead teachers to limit what they ask of students in order that students are successful. This instance suggests that the excellence and quality discourses promoted internationally alongside equity and social justice may be recontextualised in disadvantaged school settings in ways which constrain and contain teacher and student practices.

Working on quality was not a one-off episode, however. Teachers described an ensemble of practices they put in place in order to raise standards in students' literacy. Areas for attention included bookwork expectations, work habits and correctness. One teacher explained that she made her expectations explicit through a written handout (See Fig. 1).

Fig. 1 Guide lines for workbooks



In evidence here is a particular disciplining of the student subject through the teacher's use of written guides to assist in the implementation of her regime. The guide-lines lay out expectations for students' written work. As well as the direct instructions (use both sides of the page, rule off completed sections, we use blue pen), there are rules for what must not be done (without graffiti, no textas or fluoro pens). Cleanliness, neatness, order, are key themes. The teacher highlights her authority in her specifications of the colour of biro, the kinds of markers, the way the page is to be ruled up. When students did not meet these requirements, they could be required to do the work again.

I ask them to rewrite work. Yes I have asked them if they think that that is good enough and to redo it. Now they're a little bit over the top. They come and make this pathetic little mistake and could they redo it and stick it together. And I'm saying, 'No. That's OK.' So I'm trying to bring it down a bit.

This teacher reported that getting the right level of attention to presentation - a quality product - is not easy. Here students have gone 'over the top' in their concern to eliminate mistakes. As Marginson notes, ironically, one problem with the construct quality is that while 'agreement on the meaning of quality' is impossible, 'people seem to recognise it when they see, read or hear it' (Marginson, 1993, p.98). In this case, however, it becomes clear that what students take up from their teachers' exhortations for quality may be limited to improvements in what can be seen.

Teacher voice-over: Producing the literate student worker

It is important to make a distinction between what teachers say they do, discourse about practice, and what they do, the discourse of practice. Teacher talk to and with students may be different from how they talk about students. I shift now to teachers' everyday talk during literacy lessons. While there have been numerous studies of teacher-student interactions in classrooms which point to the maintenance of teacher authority and hierarchical power relations (Cazden, 1988; Dillon, 1988) relatively little attention is given to teachers' monologues, to the statements teachers make to and about students, which do not invite student response. Yet in these texts, teachers' discourses about normative studentship are clearly in evidence. In other words teachers' statements and pronouncements to students over time produce a portrayal of the ideal student subject.

During my observations I noted that teachers employed a repertoire of discursive techniques which explicitly detail how students should be and what students should do. I have named these techniques: 'voice-over', 'pep-talks' and 'on patrol' (see Table 2). Used as a cumulative strategy, these techniques produce repeated statements about (and directed towards) the student subject.

Table 2 Discursive techniques to produce the ideal student

Technique	Definition	Examples
Voice-over	What teachers say while students work	'That's not how we normally work' 'You're on task straight away' 'I'm finding your noise level too high' 'Focus on your journal please' 'Some lovely quiet workers'
Pep-talks	What teachers say about students to students	'So I think we need to get those whole listening things organised. I'm not cross. I'm not saying to you I'm cross and I'm not saying I'm disappointed because you're not like that for me. I'm really impressed, but I guess I was surprised that what you are for me you're not for somebody else. So um just think about that and just reflect on that; it's not up to somebody else outside to say 'do this, do this, do this'. You know deep down inside what you need to do. So you know deep down inside what your responsibilities are, what your responsibilities are towards each other, how you treat each other, how you listen, how you stop.'
On patrol	Individualised checking of students	'Adam have you started work?' 'It's not drawing time Daniel, it's writing time.' 'Adrianna, are you on task?'

These discursive techniques can be seen as normalising practices because they make explicit the teachers' norms for students' classroom behaviours: where their bodies should be, when and how they can speak, what they should be doing, how they should be doing it and how they should be using their time. These practices are not part of

teachers' unique styles, but are constructed from the resources available within the institutionalised repertoires of schooling. Of particular interest here is the dominance of managerialist discourses displayed in teachers' lexical choices in addressing students in everyday lessons. Let me illustrate how these discourses operate by elaborating on voice-over as a discursive technique. (See Comber, 1996 for extended analysis of pep-talks and on patrol.)

During voice-over, students are free to stay at their seats and to keep going about their set tasks (unlike other kinds of teacher talk, which do not proceed without eye-contact, silence and pens down). In fact its object is to keep students in their seats and on task. I call this teacher talk voice-over because it runs over the top, as it were, of the other activity that has already been put in place, and provides a meta-commentary upon it. To illustrate: the teacher has given the instruction about what students are to do, how they are to do it, and how long they have to do it. The students return to their seats and engage in all manner of activities from doing exactly as they are told, chatting, organising books and so on. Whilst students are supposedly engaged in independent work, teachers make statements to the class. These statements may include reminders, additions, clarifications, comments on student behaviour and comments on student products. Here the teacher, a little like the sporting commentator, tells the audience what it is they can see. In this instance however the audience are also the participants; hence the analogy falls short. However it is suggestive of the kind of talk which occurs. If the voice-over does not produce the required result it can easily be transformed into other forms of discipline. An example of voice-over from across one lesson in a grade one classroom indicates how it works.

Teacher Look at this wonderful table here - organised straight away - excellent.

Several minutes later same lesson

Teacher You're on task aren't you this morning. Excellent. Come on Kirsty and Leona.

Several minutes later same lesson

Teacher We've got about five more minutes left before we need to be organised.

Several minutes later same lesson

Teacher Right Jasmine and Scott how are you going there? I'm going to come and see what you're doing in a minute. Great workers on this table. Could you quieten down please. How are you going here boys. Excellent. Wow. Well done. Some people decided to do their look-cover-write-check straight away.

Towards the end of the same lesson

Teacher Oh let's see what's happening over here. How are you going Bruno? Right nearly recess. I don't think you've got it done - you might not be allowed to go. Right Allan let's see how you're going. [*Child complains of noise and a headache*] It's

very noisy in here. Obviously people are not really working. If I have seen you really concentrating this morning then you might be able to go out, but if I haven't seen you concentrating then when the bell goes you can stay in and do your work.

The teacher's voice-over accomplished a number of things. It named groups of children, 'tables', who were on task and organised. Individual children who were not 'on task' were encouraged with 'Come on Kirsty and Leona', reminiscent of a sports coach enthusing team members to play harder, run faster. The voice-over reminded children of:

- the teacher's presence
- the teacher's desire for them all to be 'great workers'
- the need to be quiet
- task options for early finishers
- the consequences of not getting things done
- the need to concentrate
- time limits.

Through voice-over the proper student subject is identified, described and rewarded; punitive consequences are spelt out and surveillance is maintained. The teachers' voice can be seen as an oral reminder of the teacher's presence – her ever-watchful and vigilant monitoring of student misdemeanours and transgressions, conformity and achievements. Teacher voice-over then is a reminder of the continual surveillance to which each student is subjected and for which each teacher is responsible.

The uniformity of different teachers' voice-over was striking. The construction of the literate student subject - from five year olds to thirteen year olds - was remarkably consistent across teachers and classrooms. The formation of the sensibilities of self-regulating workers was put in place from the earliest days of primary school and evident across the grade levels. Students were constituted as 'great workers' and their organisation complimented as 'very adult'. The voice-over reminded them of the need to be 'on-task' to ensure productivity within the time limits. When teachers congratulate the hard-working, quiet, on-task students, simultaneously all students are reminded of these norms.

Across the four classrooms the most common themes of teachers' voice-over talk were what students should be doing ('working', 'on task'); how students should use time (meet 'deadlines'); students' responsibilities ('tidy up', 'not to disturb others'); what different students should be doing ('people writing in roller pen', 'people who are doing spelling tests') and preferred literacy behaviours for the task at hand ('be independent', 'without asking me'). As a disciplinary practice, voice-over defines and articulates, through

repetition, the classroom norms. It overrides all other classroom activity to tell students once again who they are, how they should be and who they can be.

What counts for school success?

These constructions of studentship were revised in classroom literate practices as children wrote daily and weekly self-evaluations and journals entries. In the examples below (see Figs. 2 & 3) it is evident that children have learnt to appropriate and use the managerial discourse and to recite the repertoire of 'technologies of the self' (Foucault, 1988) which constitute the ideal student of their literacy classrooms at this time.

Fig. 2 Self-evaluation Grade 1 student

In class I am.....

A good listener. And I am on task. I don't call out. And I don't fiddle. I think and I concentrate. I help other children. I give eye contact to the person talking. I don't talk to others when I do my work. I always co-operate. I listen to instructions. I always try my best.

Fig. 3 Self-evaluation Grade 6 student

CHALLENGE

My personal challenge is to finish all my work off that we have been given.

IN THE NEXT TEN WEEKS I WANT TO ACHIEVE

1. I will like to be more organised in the morning
2. I will like to do my homework when I am supposed to.
3. I will like to be more on task than off task.
4. Reckon I can be more cooperation. (sic)

This is how I will achieve these goals. I reckon if I will work harder I could achieve the goals that I have written down.

Self-evaluation is often lauded as a progressive literacy practice, a neutral site where the student can document their own learning. In these examples we can see how this discursive practice is deployed to managerialist ends. A highly competent grade one student and a grade six student with literacy difficulties both use the act of writing to present a managerialist solution to the problems of being a student. The self-evaluation functions as a confessional and log book for the student worker taking up their teachers' grids of specification for what counts for proper studentship. However, as I will show in my final example of teacher-written report cards, the managerialist discourse does not serve them equally.

While what counts as literacy may be changing and arbitrary, assessment of literacy and broader academic success has material effects on the educational trajectories and life choices of students. Report cards therefore represent a key textual site where grids of specification to which students are subjected are made evident. In the study referred to in this paper I analysed the corpus of school reports for all students in one school for an academic year.

I began by examining the vocabulary used because, as Kamler (1994) points out, lexical choices are not insignificant; networks of words illuminate the discourses employed. Words construct specified grids: norms against which the student can be judged. Key lexical items across this corpus of reports included 'work', 'develop', 'task', 'time', 'success'. For example, the word 'work' (or worked, works, working, worker) appeared 594 times on a computer search of 148 reports. Interestingly, on the same scan the word 'learn' (or learnt/learned, learns, learning, learners) appeared 187 times. No other key words were used anywhere nearly as frequently as work: task (179), develop (170), help (166), time (161), success (122), progress (59), commit (53), manage (33). In the same scan, writing appeared 185 times, spelling 109 times, language 44 times, reading 35 times, grammar 6 times, and speaking on one occasion.

This broad analysis, including vocabulary counts, highlighted the significance of the managerial discourse in the formation of the student at that school at that time. However, teachers did not draw exclusively on the managerial discourse but blended it with other discourses: educational ('skills', 'strategies', 'progress', 'learning'), psychological ('displays', 'development', 'attitude') political ('justice') and moral ('helpful', 'cooperative', 'commitment'). After an analysis of the reports of a number of successful students I constructed a grid summarising the ideal student as constituted in teachers' reports. The consistency of what counted across the teacher writers was notable.

Table 3 The ideal student

Observable behaviours	Attitudes	Contributions to the class community
• working quietly • remaining on task • having necessary equipment • clarifying tasks • asking questions • seeking help • managing time • evaluating own progress • completing work	• being committed • being enthusiastic • [being] without aggression • being responsible • being keen to meet work expectations • being positive • having a healthy attitude to learning	• being sensitive • being compassionate • being fair and just • being helpful and cooperative • forming positive relationships with peers • helping, supporting and encouraging others • contributing thoughts, ideas and opinions • summarising discussions • making insightful observations • having a sense of humour • building on opinions of others • ready to take on extra duties

The specified observable behaviours explained how the student should relate to their teacher and their work. The ideal student actively related to the teacher by seeking help,

asking questions and clarifying tasks. Further, the student was prepared for work, worked quietly and consistently, evaluated their own progress and completed tasks on time. A teacher-student-work relationship is constituted here. The ideal student is one who initiates contact with the teacher in order to get the job done. Such a student is a self-regulated individual. When students display such behaviours, the teacher is able to make diagnostic assessments about student attitudes - commitment, enthusiasm, responsibility, a healthy attitude to learning and so on. Students are congratulated on these assumed internal attitudes, which allow them to become successful students. While this may appear as positive and benign with reference to the successful student, as I will show later there are problems with teachers diagnosing students' internal states, especially when the students represent neither the ideal, nor the norm.

Thus the ideal student was not simply an isolated competitive worker or even an active learner, but a socially responsible community member. As members of a classroom community, students were not only responsible to themselves but also to their peers. The student subject required here was a social being who demonstrated care for their community by being sensitive, helpful, cooperative, compassionate and by using their talents (sense of humour) and abilities (making insightful observations) for the good of the whole community. Being fair and just, compassionate and having a sense of humour were placed alongside completing work and meeting deadlines. The student, as the citizen-to-be, was assessed on more than academic aptitudes or work rates. Thus the managerial discourse was recontextualised in the ethos of this parochial school.

The analysis yielded a concrete illustration of the contradictory nature of the postmodern subject and how a multiplicity of discourses impacts on teachers' work and literacy pedagogy. In one sense, it was reassuring that while the managerialism had arrived in this small community school, this dominant discourse from the public sphere was modified and remodelled in this site. However, this broad analysis alone was insufficient in considering questions about the impact of these discursive formations on the lives of disadvantaged students and, in particular, the ways in which literacy was inserted into the construction of success and failure in the report cards. How would such a grid of competencies work for or against a student who was assessed as problematic? I turn now to Carlo's story.

Carlo had been at the school for upwards of five years by the time the report reproduced below was written (see Fig. 4). Carlo lived with both parents and several brothers and sisters. He spoke Italian as his first and family language and had learnt English as a second language at school. When this report was written he was in grade six in a grade five/six/seven composite class.

Fig 4 Carlo's Grade Six Report

SCHOOL REPORT		
Carlo	Year 5/6/7	April 1992
Carlo began this year with a positive attitude. His actions showed that he was determined to succeed. He was prepared each day with the things that he needed, he began work quickly and he remained on task. Carlo has maintained this attitude most of the term. Consequently, he is experiencing a successful term. Our recent language work represented a major challenge for Carlo and he worked hard to meet it. During this work Carlo began to realise the importance of managing his time wisely. He is currently developing the skill of breaking the large task into smaller bits and then working through them, step by step. He is beginning to realise the need to clarify the task when he is unsure and to seek the help that he needs. He is gradually becoming aware of his own responsibility in his learning. With continued practice and encouragement Carlo will further develop in this area. Carlo's main area of need at this stage is reading. He needs support and daily practice. I am encouraging Carlo to regularly change his book, to read at home and to read to me. He is showing positive signs of growth. Carlo is helpful and co-operative in class. He is always willing to take on extra duties. Signed teacher.....Principal.....		

Carlo is evaluated across a grid of performance drawing on managerial, psychological and educational discourses. He has a 'positive attitude', 'his actions show that he was determined to succeed', he has 'the things that he needed', he 'began work quickly' and 'remained on task', 'he is experiencing a successful term'. However, the use of success in relation to a 'successful term' is qualified. In the second paragraph there are some signals that Carlo, despite his following the norms of hard work and effort, may not be experiencing the same kind of success as his peers.

In Carlo's case positive attitude may not be enough. We are told that the recent language work 'represented a major challenge for Carlo'. Then we are told that Carlo 'worked hard to meet it'. The teacher goes on to portray Carlo as needing to 'break the task into smaller bits' in order to work through them 'step by step'. While it is never made explicit, there are hints that Carlo finds school work difficult.

In Carlo's report, words such as 'major challenge', 'unsure', 'smaller', trigger warning bells for teacher readers, but may well go unnoticed by parent readers. Given their multiple audiences and functions, it is not surprising that teachers are cautious in what they write in reports. In anticipating student, parent, teacher, principal and other allied 'child professionals' as would be readers, teachers need to be careful. The report is a document intended to produce positive effects unobtrusively and to avoid producing negative effects. Euphemisms provide one technique for teachers to soften negative evaluations of the student (McKenzie 1992).

While Carlo has presented himself as the ideal student in terms of work habits and attitudes, the 'language work' continues to present him with a major challenge. After signalling that all is not completely well, but without identifying exactly what is wrong, the teacher moves to reassure by promising that with 'practice and encouragement' Carlo 'will further develop in this area'. Exactly what 'this area' is remains unclear.

The report then goes on to state that Carlo's 'main area of need at this stage is reading', but exactly why this is so is not specified. The teacher reports that Carlo requires step by step practice and regular professional monitoring, yet she reassures parent readers that he is showing positive signs of growth, presumably in reading. The teacher is faced with multiple dilemmas in writing Carlo's report. Having set her criteria around work habits and attitudes, it is then difficult to write about a student who presents with these, but still struggles to succeed by academic criteria. Thus the report is written to acknowledge Carlo's efforts but to signal to a professional reader that all is not completely well. The chances are that this report could be heard by Carlo, his parents and siblings as 'successful', whilst the principal, future teachers and the principal of the selective high school to which he might apply, will recognise the euphemisms for a student experiencing learning and literacy difficulties – the child who needs the task broken into smaller bits, who experiences major challenges with his language work and who at eleven and a half years of age needs to read aloud to his teacher. Carlo (even with the right attitude, commitment, responsibility and work habits) is recognisable as a student with unspecified literacy difficulties.

When Carlo seeks a school reference to gain entry to a selective high school the Principal is faced with a similar dilemma. On which professional discourses can or should she draw to support his application as she wants to do? Elsewhere I have discussed Carlo's entire report folio and his educational history in more detail and demonstrated how children can become the casualties of dominant educational pedagogies (Comber, 1996, forthcoming, 1997). Ironically and tragically, the analysis of Carlo's primary school report archive indicates that neither progressive educational discourses nor managerial discourses resulted in him getting the help he needed to learn to read and write well enough to participate successfully in high school. Carlo dropped out of school as soon as he was old enough. In effect these discourses obscure the pedagogical process and its outcomes. Teachers acting with the best intentions and diligently following professional advice take on the vocabularies of progressivism or managerialism in assessing students and in so doing constitute Carlo as successful, thereby unwittingly contributing to a fiction that ultimately works against him.

'Following Foucault'?

Brodkey writes that the problems she studied were on her mind long before she read poststructural theory, but that poststructural theory helped her to construct a position from which she could view her own and others' work on the history of literacy (Brodkey 1992, p.316). It gave her new ways of looking at curriculum and practice. This is true for me also. I did not begin this study with Foucault in mind. Rather, I began the study with cumulative questions developed across my educational life and brought a Foucauldian analysis to this project in order to make the familiar strange and to consider the effects of my own discursive practices as a literacy educator and researcher.

In tracing 'the traverse of managerial discourses' in this paper, I have back-grounded teachers' and students' 'resistance'. Yet there were a number of occasions where teachers and students contested the managerialist discourses and associated regimes of institutional practices. For instance, one teacher dealt with behaviour management issues, such as peer aggression by writing a humorous class story called 'Trouble In Sunshine Room', where the teacher is finally rescued by the Principal who sends her off to the staffroom for a cup of tea. During an unscheduled classroom visit by the Principal, she was persuaded by the teacher and students to act out the script of their story, in which a principal attempts to control an unruly class. The irony of the principal acting as principal and the teacher acting as teacher escaping to the staffroom was not lost on this class of five and six year old children. There was a sense in which rebellious conspiracy was never too far away, and teachers and students did go beyond the boundaries of what we might call a managerialist minimalist curriculum.

I am aware of many untold stories of 'resistance' (Foucault, 1978) 'trickery' and 'making do' (de Certeau, 1988, p 29). My fear is that by focussing on the pervasiveness of managerial discourses in this paper I may have given the impression that teachers and students simply took up these practices unproblematically. They didn't. Transcripts and fieldnotes indicate continual resistance, disruptions and contestation from students, sometimes quite overt and often more concealed. For example in one lesson while the teacher was explaining the next task in which students were to write a self assessment, a small group of students, including Carlo, chanted 'self-evaluation... self-evaluation... self-evaluation' just loud enough to be heard by peers, but not to be detected on a tape-recorder or by the teacher. On this and other occasions a group of students directly questioned the teacher about her new 'work regime', including time management strategies such as written plans. These instances signified not simple discontent with school life in general but were explicitly targeted at the managerial discursive practices to which they were being subjected.

However, it is more difficult to show such resistance in critical discourse analytic approaches partly because resistance is not limited to what can be produced in words. It involves the body and the unspoken (see Kamler this issue). And unauthorised spoken discourse tends to go underground. Such talk is less likely to be picked up on a tape-recorder than a pep-talk by a disappointed teacher and it's less likely to be overtly displayed to a university researcher. Even when it is captured it is likely to be less convincing than what we expect to hear and read and it is difficult in expository researcher prose to convey the energy and art of resistance.

This is not simply a problem of a Foucauldian reading. In fact my reading of Foucault meant that I was looking for and expecting resistance as part of the everyday practices of school life. Notwithstanding the potential of critical discourse analysis for understanding the effects of competing discourses in actual locations, in this discussion it has been easier to demonstrate how managerialism works than to convincingly portray how it is undermined and revised in an actual site. Yet the effects of such discourses are neither immaterial nor inconsequential as Carlo's story begins to suggest. Carlo's appropriation of the managerialist discourse, his subjection to it and his resistance of it raise further pedagogical and research questions about how a critical discourse analysis may productively contribute to rethinking literacy curricula and teaching in disadvantaged schools. Such a project may involve teachers and students as co-researchers actively deconstructing and reconstructing the subject positions and limits of dominant educational discourses and of their uptake in the classroom setting.

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